

"AIR AMERICA six-eight turning base."

"Six-eight you're cleared for landing on runway three," the U.S. Air Force noncom in the tower at Saigon's busy civilian-military Tan Son Nhut Airport matter-of-factly replied. He was too busy to watch the black-painted C-47 glide into view as it made its final approach. Not so the junior sergeant seated beside him who eyed the plane, puzzled.

Three messages later a voice crackled through the loud-speaker in the air-conditioned tower: "This is America four-two ready for take-off."

"Four-two, you're clear on runway eight," the senior noncom replied. He turned his attention to other messages from other aircraft awaiting instructions to take off or land. It wasn't until some time later that the younger air traffic controller—new to Vietnam—got a chance to ask

the senior noncom the question that had been bugging him for some time.

"Sarge," he asked, "what's this 'Air America'? I recognize the names of all of the other airlines we're dealing with, but what is Air America? It's a new one on me."

"Sonny, just forget the name and don't go asking too many questions," the older noncom advised. "It's the 'spook airline' and the less you ask about it, the better off you'll be..."

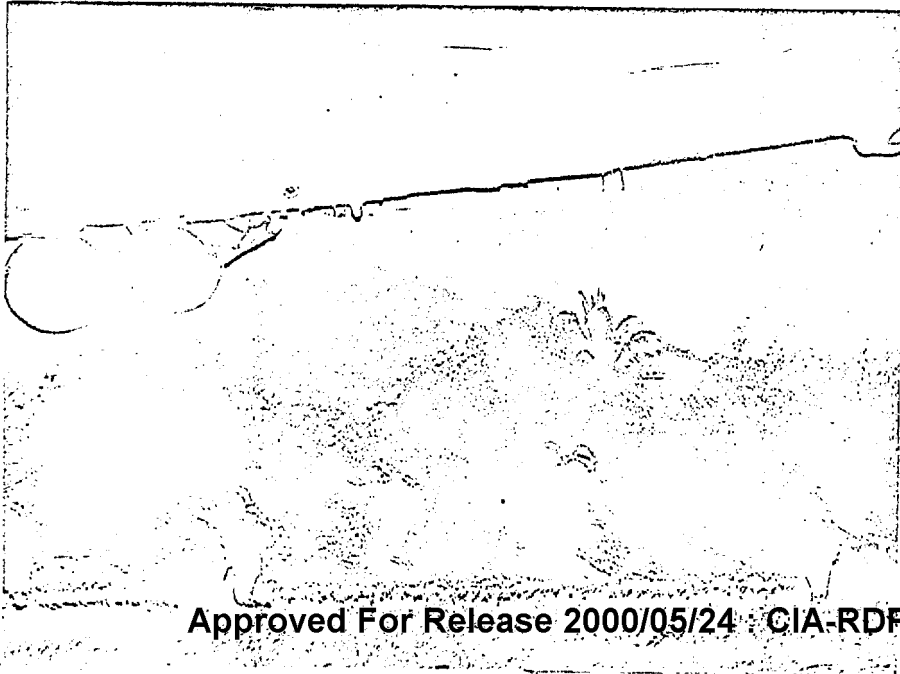
At the other end of Tan Son Nhut Air Base, John McGann, Manager of Air America's Southeast Asia operation, was busy on the phone. Not much could be made of his terse conversation other than that he was discussing a "shipment" that had to be air-dropped. What the shipment was and where it would be dropped was something he was not about to discuss. In fact, John (Continued on page 65)

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THE AIRLINE NOBODY DARES TALK ABOUT

Only a few people know the truth about Air America; the rest can only guess. And that's the way its pilots—and the C.I.A.—like it.

In Vietnam, Air America's pilots fly under combat conditions—sometimes transporting men for the armed services, sometimes making "top secret" drops behind enemy lines.



According to reports, Allen Pope (below) was flying for AA when shot down over Indonesia.

